

Measure H Funding Recommendations Process- FYs 2020-23

Homeless Initiative Policy Summit #2
Prevention & Diversion

Thursday, October 3, 2019

Key Points:

1. **Increase points of access for prevention services.** There is a need to open up more access points to prevention funds and services, rather than just providing access through the Prevention/Rapid Re-Housing lead agencies.
2. **Expand/refine outreach and communications efforts.** A clearer communications/outreach strategy regarding prevention programs is needed to ensure that people in need know where and how to access funds and services.
3. **Improve process and timeline for referrals to legal services.** The referral process for clients needing legal services should be re-examined because oftentimes legal assistance cannot be requested until too late in the eviction process, or once the referral is made, clients struggle to actually get connected to the legal services provider. Earlier legal services intervention is needed.
4. **Consider implications of prevention program focusing on/targeting highest-risk individuals.** Locating the prevention program within the homeless services system means that our prevention programs are targeting the highest risk/most vulnerable individuals, many of whom are already connected to the homeless services system. This was a policy choice made at the outset of the prevention program, which could be re-assessed if desired.
5. **Consider multiple prevention tracks for different populations/levels of need.** Consider whether there should be two or more buckets of prevention funding, with some targeting higher risk individuals and some targeting individuals not connected to the Coordinated Entry System (CES)/people at-risk of first-time homelessness.
6. **Incorporate problem solving into all components of service delivery.** Allow people experiencing homelessness the opportunity to tap into their resiliency, rather than turning to high-resource interventions too quickly. Due to lack of housing, success should not be defined as finding a housing resource for every individual.

Prevention and Diversion Policy Summit Notes
(Discussion questions in bold)

How can we improve and expedite referrals for Prevention Services (case management, cash assistance, legal services) without utilizing prevention funds for people who are likely to remain housed without receiving Prevention Services?

Increase access points

- Increase localized services for people with disabilities or older adults who cannot drive.
- Increase number of access points to services in each Service Planning Area (SPA) - not just with one lead agency, since SPAs are so large.

Improve outreach/education

- Increase education and outreach; many people do not even know that prevention services exist.
- For some (especially first-time homeless or vehicular homeless), the stigma of homelessness prevents them from seeking assistance at homeless service agencies.
- Disseminate information about prevention services to agencies working with vulnerable populations (churches, charities, etc.) or at locations where people in financial crises may be found (pay-day loan outlets, food banks, etc.).
- Educate landlords and property managers about what services are available to tenants.
- Concern about data collection: Only shows people successfully connected to services—What about people who are not connected to services or able to access services?
- Avoid pouring resources into outreach to people already in County systems because the agencies working with them should be conveying appropriate information to them. It's more important that those who are not connected to mainstream systems or the homeless services system be targeted for outreach.
- Consider establishing a phone line that people could call if they need to access prevention services, so they can be properly triaged (similar to LA-HOP). However, a similar call center in Chicago ends up getting mostly phone calls from people who are not actually at risk of becoming homeless,
- Refer to Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness recommendations regarding targeting.

Improve legal services connections

- Strengthen relationships between prevention services agencies and legal service providers – most of the referrals to legal service providers hinge on established relationships, which are not consistent within each SPA.

- Currently, the protocol for referrals to legal services results in clients not being able to access legal services until they are too close to eviction for those services to be truly effective. Need to rethink.

While we refine the predictive analytics tools for homelessness prevention, what approaches can we take to improve outreach and targeting for prevention recipients?

Re-assess prevention program focus on highly vulnerable individuals already connected to the system

- Current system is structured in a way that means targeted participants are generally “higher-risk” individuals. This is a function of having the prevention program embedded in the homeless services system.
- Targeting prevention services means being able to predict which people won’t be able to survive short-term financial shocks.
- There are individuals who are high-risk, but are not connected to CES
- Consider whether having two tiers of prevention services is an option – one for higher risk individuals/one for people at risk of first-time homeless/not connected to mainstream County systems or the homeless services system.
- Need to differentiate between people who experience one-time, serious financial burden (but are less vulnerable) vs. people who are accessing many services (and very vulnerable). The needs of people in those two groups may be different.

Challenges of allocating and expending funding for prevention efforts

- While there is a need for more funding for prevention, resources for people who are already experiencing homelessness are already inadequate. We shouldn’t be moving funds away from homeless services programs to fund prevention when there are people knocking on agencies’ doors asking for help – funds need to come from elsewhere.
- Difficult to predict who will become homeless; most people who experience a crisis that could push them into homelessness will self-resolve.
- 80% of people who become homeless are known to County systems.
- Despite high need for prevention, there was still underspending of A1 and A5 allocations. LAHSA attributes underspending to staffing vacancies and providers being conservative in expending funds at the beginning of the year.
- Many providers report feeling that they are running out of prevention funds, even when they may not be. Need to ensure providers have accurate sense of available funding so they can appropriately target.

Consideration of groups with unique needs and vulnerabilities

- Concern for 24-year-olds who are aging out of TAY services and entering adult services where resources may be scarcer – could fund vocational programs for young adults to prepare them for future challenges.
- Transwomen, transwomen of color, and LGBTQ communities are especially vulnerable populations that are at risk of homelessness.

- Veterans, who may have exceeded the funding they are able to access through the VA, have difficulty accessing mainstream CES.

What cultural and practical changes are necessary within the homeless services system in order to ensure that “diversion/problem-solving” is integrated into all facets of service delivery?

- Look at prevention as the intervention and diversion as an outcome.
- Focus on client autonomy and capabilities—do not focus on what clients can’t do, but on what they can do for themselves.
- Have clients ask not “How much can I get out of the system?” but instead “How can I be accompanied on the journey of self-empowerment?”.
- Increase system flexibility—How can we systematically incorporate problem-solving intervention at the beginning and every step of the way thereafter?
- Redefine success—we should not measure success based on how many services we can connect someone to or how many clients were connected to a housing resource, but on how much we can rely on someone’s strengths and resiliency.
- Fundamentally invest in people with lived experience to lead trainings and be a critical part of the homeless services system.
- Providers should have the ability to switch back to problem solving at any point in the provision of services, especially if there are inadequate resources available.
- Problem solving is a teachable skill – need to take the time to train folks.

How can we incentivize and reward the participation of front line workers at mainstream County departments in prevention/problem-solving work?

- Improve training for frontline staff so they can better identify who needs prevention services.
Case workers in jails/prisons could screen people and determine who should be connected to prevention services and then connect them to a case manager. For example, the Community Transition Unit at the jails should be involved.
- Need to ensure that SAPC Client Engagement and Navigation Services employees are appropriately trained and involved in prevention/problem solving.
- Homeless Initiative could provide a certificate of recognition to staff for achievement in problem-solving.
- DMH has thousands of caseworkers who are starting to receive training on problem solving, which is a major systems change.
- DMH is considering flagging at-risk individuals in their data system so they can intervene appropriately.

Public Comments

- Have awareness of and respect for Black people’s ability to do things for themselves (budgeting, etc.) rather than implying that they are unable to do so.
- Improve referrals to legal services. If considering a phone line, look at the successes and failures of 211 to inform a phone line would be operationalized. Keep track of those who are not enrolled in prevention (because they don’t qualify) to determine outcomes.

- Create a universal assessment tool that can be used by agencies outside the LAHSA system/by those not funded by LAHSA.
- Leverage the skills and cultural competencies of community-based organizations to connect with people experiencing homelessness.
- Require inclusion of the prevention services flyer in 3-day notices and unlawful detainers.
- We have leeway to think outside the box with new state money. Important to have people who “look like us” - hire more Black and Latinx staff at access centers, so those most impacted by homelessness feel like they can work with someone who understands them. Be aware of frontline staff burnout (especially in South Central).
- Take advantage of financial services that could help address financial shocks.